



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY NEWS RELEASE

Department of Toxic Substances Control

T - 07 - 06
For Immediate Release
January 23, 2006

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New Waste Disposal Rules Apply to Batteries, Fluorescent Lights Four-Year Exemption for Households, Small Businesses to Expire

SACRAMENTO – The Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) today announced new waste disposal rules affecting households and small businesses will go into effect Feb. 9. The rules relate to products containing mercury or heavy metals, including batteries and fluorescent lights, which are considered universal waste in California.

Since 2002, households and small businesses have been exempt from the state's Universal Waste Rule, which applies to certain hazardous wastes generated by a wide variety of people. The exemption was intended to give local agencies more time to develop the infrastructure to collect and properly dispose these materials.

Under the rule, "universal waste" is defined as batteries, mercury thermostats, fluorescent lights, cathode ray tube devices (computer monitors, televisions), mercury thermometers, and other products containing mercury or other heavy metals.

"These materials can endanger public health and harm the environment when improperly disposed," said DTSC Director Maureen Gorsen. "Our goal is encourage Californians to recycle or properly dispose fluorescent lamps, batteries, thermostats and electronic devices."

Although the household and small business exemptions sunset on Feb. 8, Gorsen said DTSC will focus enforcement efforts on illegal dumping and egregious violations involving large quantities of universal waste.

"We realize some communities offer more convenient disposal and recycling options than others," said Gorsen. "So we will continue to work with other agencies and retailers to offer convenient disposal and recycling options, and will continue to educate the public about the proper disposal of these products."

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Mercury, released into the environment through the improper disposal of mercury-containing products, is a known neurotoxin. Exposure to high levels of mercury can permanently damage the brain, kidneys, and developing fetuses. Short term exposure may damage lungs, cause nausea, vomiting, increases in blood pressure, skin rash and eye irritation.

A complete list of universal waste products, and information about disposal and recycling options, is available on the DTSC Web site at

<http://www.dtsc.ca.gov/HazardousWaste/UniversalWaste/index.cfm>

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The Department of Toxic Substances Control's mission is to restore, protect, and enhance the environment and ensure public health, environmental quality and economic vitality by regulating hazardous waste, conducting and overseeing cleanups, and developing and promoting pollution prevention.